



North Quabbin Health Collaborative



Public Health Newsletter
COVERING: November 24th – November 30th, 2025
PUBLISHED December 5, 2025

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Upcoming Events:

Next Collaborative Meeting

Monday March 30th at 6pm
Location: Orange Town Hall

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SPECIAL EVENTS:

ORANGE

Midnight Madness is Saturday December 13th from 6pm to midnight. Come on out, join the festivities, support local businesses, and save for the holiday season!



Reminders

- **Saturday December 13th is National Unity Day** - We are all better if we unite
- **Monday December 17th is National Wear Your Pearls Day** - If you have em, wear em
- **Wednesday December 17th is National Say It Now Day** - If you are thinking it, say it!



Visit the North Quabbin Health Collaborative website to download materials and see additional information at: <https://www.northquabbinhc.org/>

Don't forget to send your area news and activities to cpage@townoforange.org to be included in the next newsletter.

Massachusetts Public Health Officials Issue Safety Alert to Employers After State's First Confirmed Silicosis Case in Stone Countertop Industry

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

Silicosis is an incurable and potentially fatal, but preventable, lung disease associated with working in the stone countertop industry

BOSTON – The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today issued a safety alert urging employers in the stone countertop fabrication industry to protect workers from silica dust exposure, following the first confirmed case of silicosis among this workforce in Massachusetts.

Silicosis is a preventable, yet incurable and progressive lung disease caused by inhaling crystalline silica, which is found naturally in granite and other stones. The state's first confirmed case associated with occupational exposure in this industry was recently diagnosed in a Hispanic man in his 40s who, for the past 14 years, worked for stone countertop fabrication and installation companies in Massachusetts.

Processes like cutting, polishing, or grinding stone can generate silica dust, which can cause silicosis if breathed into the lungs. Historically, silicosis was associated with mining and construction, but in recent years, the disease has become more prevalent among stone fabrication workers due to the rise in popularity of countertops made from engineered stone (also known as quartz or artificial stone), which contains significantly more silica than other types of stone – over 90 percent compared to less than 45 percent in granite.

While this is the state's first confirmed case of silicosis among this workforce, the growing number of cases recently reported in other states and countries linked to this industry suggests that additional, unconfirmed cases could exist in Massachusetts.

There is a long latency period between silica exposure and the development of silicosis. Silicosis is an often disabling and sometimes fatal disease that is characterized by scarring of the lungs. Early symptoms include an irritating cough, mucus, and shortness of breath. As the disease progresses, people may have difficulty breathing and can experience fatigue, chest pain, leg swelling, and blueish lips. Silicosis increases the risk for other lung diseases, such as lung cancer and tuberculosis.

Most engineered stone workers with silicosis in the U.S. were exposed to silica at their jobs for over ten years, although some were exposed for less time. There is no cure for silicosis, but exposure to silica dust can be minimized through proper workplace controls.

Massachusetts Public Health Officials Issue Safety Alert to Employers After State's First Confirmed Silicosis Case in Stone Countertop Industry Continued

“Silicosis is a devastating, life-altering disease – and one that is also absolutely preventable,” said Public Health Commissioner Robbie Goldstein, MD, PhD. “Massachusetts employers in industries where workers are exposed to silica dust have a responsibility to protect their workforce, including from harmful airborne dust. No worker should have to suffer from a chronic and insidious lung disease or possibly die because of a preventable exposure at work.”

“The confirmation of this case in Massachusetts is a tragic reminder that silicosis is not just a distant threat – it is here, and it is seriously impacting the health of workers in Massachusetts,” said Emily H. Sparer-Fine, Director of DPH’s Occupational Health Surveillance Program. “Beyond the critical role employers play, everyone involved in the supply chain – from consumers and designers to contractors – can help reduce the danger by opting for materials that contain less silica and pose fewer health hazards.”

Most cases of silicosis are work-related – it is very rare for silicosis to occur outside of workplace exposure. The first reported case of silicosis in the U.S. associated with exposure to silica dust from engineering stone was identified in Texas in 2014. Since then, other states have reported hundreds of cases, and dozens of deaths, particularly in [California](#). Cases have also been reported globally, with Australia going as far as banning the use and manufacture of engineered stone last year.

In the U.S., most engineered stone workers with silicosis are relatively young, male, and Hispanic/Latino. This largely reflects the demographic composition of this industry’s workforce. In 2023, over half of workers in this industry were under 45 years old, nearly three-quarters were men, and more than 1 in 3 were Hispanic/Latino, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Workers in other industries, such as construction and masonry, might also be at risk of exposure to silica dust when working with silica-containing construction materials, such as sand, stone, concrete, brick, or mortar.

By issuing this [safety alert](#), DPH’s Occupational Health Surveillance Program is sounding the alarm to raise awareness among employers in Massachusetts about the hazards of silica and how to protect their workers’ health and safety. The program has also issued a hazard alert for countertop industry workers in [English](#), [Spanish](#), and [Portuguese](#) with information about silica dust, silicosis, and employees’ rights to a safe workplace. Preventing this disease is dependent on employers putting effective workplace controls in place.

In 2016, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) updated relevant rules to help keep stone countertop fabrication workers safer – for example, by requiring ventilation and other methods to limit exposure to respirable silica dust.

Massachusetts Public Health Officials Issue Safety Alert to Employers After State's First Confirmed Silicosis Case in Stone Countertop Industry Continued

Other key workplace controls recommendations:

- Use effective dust control methods, such as wet cutting or proper dust collection systems.
- Make sure fabrication work takes place in well-ventilated areas.
- Follow housekeeping practices that minimize dust in the air, such as wet sweeping or using a HEPA-filtered vacuum (instead of dry sweeping).
- Periodically assess the levels of silica dust in the workplace.
- Enroll workers in a medical surveillance program that includes periodic exams by a qualified health care provider.
- Develop and implement a written exposure control plan.
- Train employees in their preferred languages on the health effects associated with silica dust and related control methods as part of a hazard communication program.
- Provide workers with appropriate respirators based on the task and ensure they are used correctly with an accompanying respiratory protection program.
-

Employers are also encouraged to utilize the state's Department of Labor Standards' [On-Site Consultation Program](#), a free and confidential service designed to help them recognize and control possible safety and health hazards at their worksites and establish and improve safety and health programs. The goal of the service is to prevent injuries and illnesses that are the result of hazardous workplace conditions and practices.

Health care providers also play an important role in active surveillance of silicosis by being vigilant about asking their adult patients about their work, particularly if they have respiratory symptoms. Because symptoms can take years to appear, silicosis diagnosis is often delayed. Early diagnosis and timely intervention can help slow down the progression of the disease. Silicosis is a reportable condition in Massachusetts, and providers are mandated to report suspected cases to DPH.

Between the long latency period before symptoms show and the current demand for engineered stone products, additional cases of engineered stone-associated silicosis are, unfortunately, expected to emerge in the future. This is a growing occupational health concern that emphasizes the importance of coordinated efforts among public health, health care providers, employers, and regulatory agencies to prevent further cases and protect worker health.

Massachusetts Drought Alert - December 10, 2025

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Dear local public health partner,

Despite some improvements, drought conditions have continued in most of Massachusetts. The Cape and Islands Regions and Millers Basin are at Level 2-Significant Drought, while the Connecticut River Valley, Central and Northeast Regions are at Level 1-Mild Drought. The Western and Southeast Regions are at normal condition.

To continue to enhance awareness on the current drought conditions, EEA and MEMA are asking local, state and regional partners and stakeholder groups to assist in disseminating this critical information to residents, businesses and institutions in their respective communities. Attached is a one page “Drought Alert” ([PDF](#)) ([JPG](#)) that provides information on the current drought conditions and how communities across the Commonwealth can do their part on water conservation and drought preparedness.

For more information on the current drought conditions, technical guidance regarding drought management actions and for drought-related tools and outreach materials, please visit www.mass.gov/ma-drought-management; for water conservation information, go to www.mass.gov/conservemawater.

Sincerely,

Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Calendar of Events

NEW SALEM Library Saturday December 13th at 1pm, Part 2 of the Healthy Living Series. This session will focus on the importance of sleep and the impact of social connection.

WARWICK LIBRARY: Mobile MakerSpace workshop (#12) - Paper Ornaments: Saturday, Dec. 13th @ 1 pm - for all ages: Learn various techniques to create unique paper decorations. Using various materials to create festive ornaments for holidays, birthdays, or for fun. Space is limited –please register in advance. Program will run approx. 90 minutes

NEW SALEM Songs of Celebration and Light - Wednesday, December 17, at 2 p.m - Moonlight and Morning Star are a multicultural duo from New Salem who have performed in New England and beyond for over 30 years. The Wendell Community Chorus has been singing and performing locally for 15 years (give or take a few). Together they will bring a joyful noise to the New Salem library Wednesday, December 17, at 2 p.m. This concert will feature songs from many traditions... with a couple of singalongs for those who love to sing. For more information, contact Morning Star at morningstar210@gmail.com.

WARWICK LIBRARY: Non-Fiction Discussion Group - Thursday, December 18th @ 7 pm: This discussion group is wide open: Could be something you're reading now or from long ago; science, history, memoirs, biographies; articles, books, newsletters, journals. It's all up for discussion at the new non-fiction discussion group. Designed for independent, asynchronous reading, we'll get together to share our favorite non-fiction reads and make recommendations. Come to share/discuss or just to listen and build your reading list.

NEW SALEM Library Wednesday January 7th at 2pm, our Public Health Nurse will be at the senior Wednesdays for Tea and Topics at the New Salem Library talking about staying safe in dropping temperatures

NEW SALEM Library Saturday December 13th at 1pm, Part 3 of the Healthy Living Series. This session will focus on stress management and cognitive health.

WARWICK Town Hall Tuesday January 20th at noon, wellness clinic with our Public Health Nurse following the senior lunch

WARWICK Library Tuesday January 20th at 7pm, Blood Pressure and Heart Health presentation with our Public Health Nurse to launch their libraries with heart initiative.

Community Food Access Resource List

Resource Names	Location	Days/Hours	Contact Information
Good Neighbor Food Pantry	Old Town Hall Wendell, 6 Center St, Wendell	Sundays 11am-noon, Last Name A-K 1st and 3rd Sunday, Last Name L-Z 2nd and 4th Sunday	978-544-3775
The Salvation Army	107 Ridge Ave, Athol	Tuesday 9am-noon, Every other Tuesday delivery	978-249-8111
The Salvation Army	72 Chapman St, Greenfield	Monday 9am-11am, Closed on Holidays	413-773-3154
Our Lady Immaculate Church	192 School St, Athol	Tuesdays 10am-1:30pm	978-249-6790
Greenfield Pop Pantry	2nd Congregation Church, 16 Court Sq, Greenfield	Tuesdays 4:30pm-5:30pm	413-774-4355
Community Food Pantry at Athol High School	2363 Main St, Athol (Located in the back of AHS)	Wednesdays, Summer hours 11am-1pm, School year hours 3pm-5pm	978-249-2435 ext 314
Athol Senior Center	82 Freedom St, Athol	Wednesdays 11am-11:45am	978-249-8986
Orange Council on Aging	St Mary's, 20 West Myrtle St, Orange	Wednesdays 10am-11am	978-544-3481
Turners Falls Mobile Food Bank	62 5th St, Turners Falls	3rd Wednesday of Month 1:30pm-2:30pm	413-419-0079
Orange Food Pantry	118 East Main St, Orange	Thursdays 10am-3pm (If it's a holiday then it will be open on Wednesday. Deliveries on Friday for Athol/Orange)	978-544-2149 (call for deliveries)
St Vincent De Paul/St Mary's Food Pantry	19 Congress St, Orange	Open by appointment only	978-544-6814
Marion's Food Pantry	On the Royalston Common	Open by appointment only	978-895-7887
The Salvation Army	72 Chapman St, Greenfield	Monday-Friday 8:30am-9:30am (Breakfast) 11am-12:30pm (Lunch)	413-773-3154
Our Lady of Peace Church	90 7th St, Turners Falls	Mondays 4pm-5:30pm (Distributing hot meals and grocery bags to go from the sidewalk in front of the church)	413-863-2585
The Salvation Army	107 Ridge Ave, Athol	Tuesdays 4:30pm-5:30pm (Dine in/Delivery)	978-249-8111
Second Congregational Church	16 Court Square, Greenfield	Tuesdays and Wednesdays 4:45pm-5:45pm, hot meals to go Tuesdays and Wednesdays on the side driveway	413-774-4355
Athol Senior Center	82 Freedom St, Athol	Tuesdays and Wednesdays at noon (Must RSVP the day before). For individuals 60 and over and/or disabled. Senior Dining at Lynn's Luncheonette. Enjoy lunch with others. A \$3.50 donation is welcome	978-249-8986 Reserve your meal by 9am the day before you dine
St Frances Church Hall	101 Main St, Athol	Wednesdays (September-May) doors open at 5pm	978-249-7304
Orange United Methodist Church	104 S Main St, Orange	Thursdays 4:30pm-5:15pm (Distributing ready-made meals to heat up at home. We offer deliveries for meals and pantry bags by applications)	413-772-1033 https://www.fccmp.org/community-meals/orange/
Trinitarian Congregational Church	147 Main St, Northfield	Fourth Thursday 4:30pm (Take out meals only. You must RSVP)	413-498-5839
Athol Congregational Church	1225 Chestnut St, Athol	First Friday of the Month, doors open at 5pm, dinner at 5:30pm (Must RSVP by Tuesday for a meal on Friday)	978-249-6202
Meals on Wheels	Athol Senior Center & Orange Council on Aging	LifePath Inc of Greenfield provides home delivered (noontime) meals to homebound seniors, age 60 and older and/or disabled, who are not able to prepare nutritious and balanced meals for themselves.	1-800-732-4636 (call to see if eligible)

Senior Dining Community Resource List

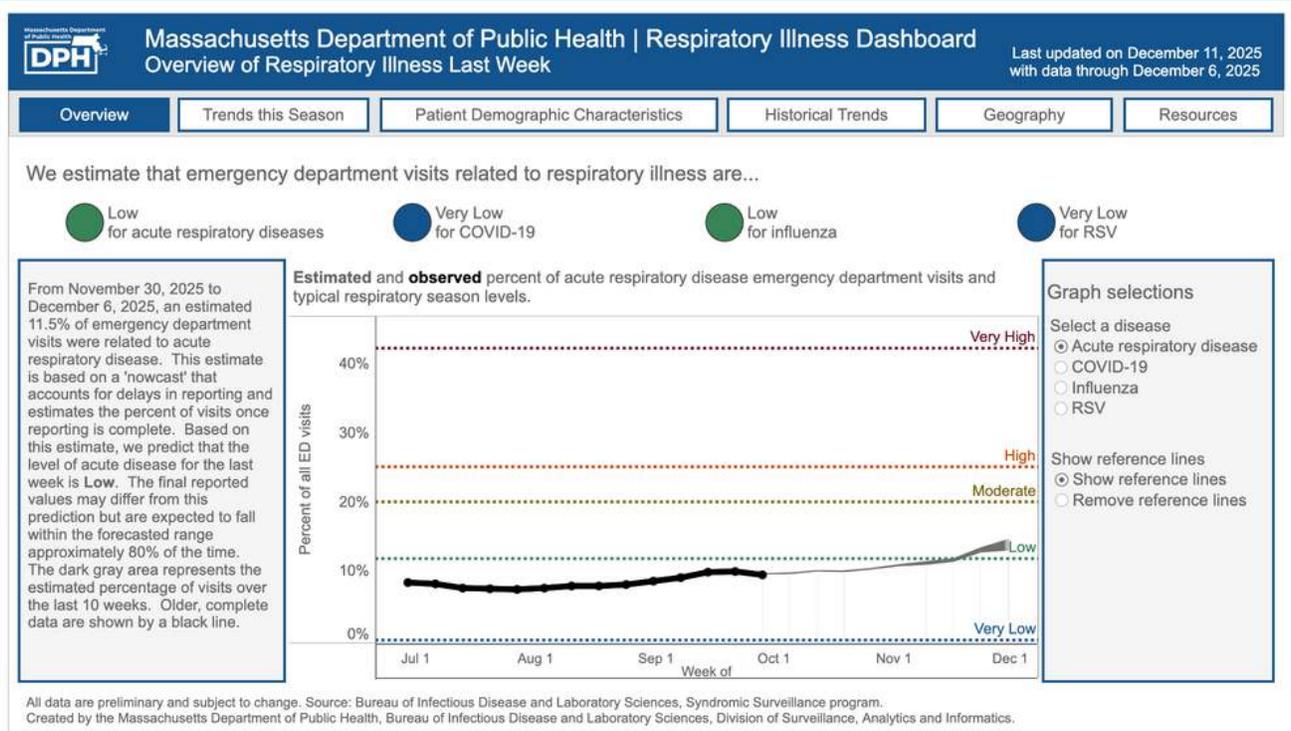
Senior Dining Center or Luncheon Club Location	Serving Days Schedule	Contact/Phone Reservations
Athol Senior Center 82 Freedom Street Athol, MA 01331	Tuesday & Wednesday Congregate	(978) 249-9001
New Salem Luncheon Club Central Congregational Church 22 South Main St. New Salem, MA 01355	2nd & 4th Friday of the month Congregate Dine-in	(978) 575-0116
Petersham Luncheon Club Town Hall Petersham, MA 01366	Wednesday Congregate and Grab and Go	978-821-5549
Phillipston Luncheon Club 1st Congregational Church The Common Phillipston, MA 01331	1st & 3rd Tuesday of the month Congregate Dine-in Closed December to March	(978) 407-9504
Royalston Luncheon Club Town Hall Royalston, MA 01368	Wednesday Congregate Dine-in	978-249-8957

NQHC COVID-19 and Other Reportable Diseases

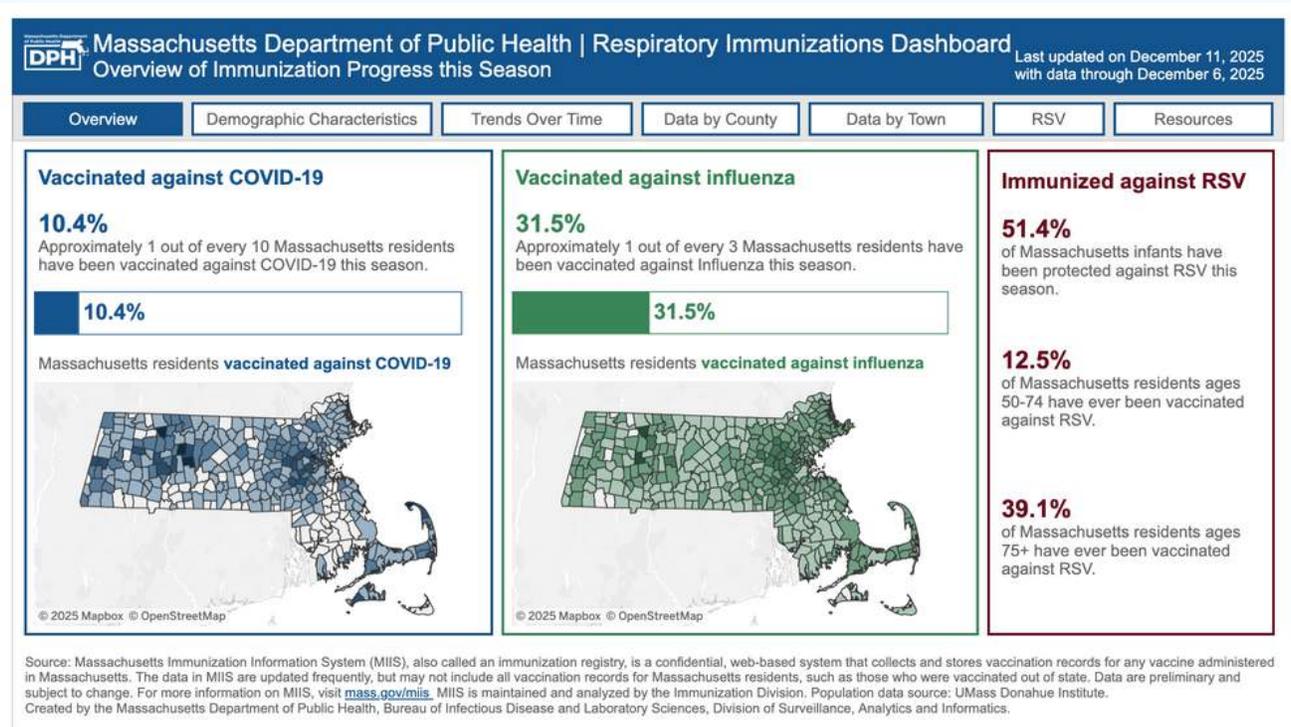
In the the one-week period of December 1st through December 7th, 2025:

- 0 official cases of COVID-19 within the district
- 6 cases of influenza

Respiratory Illness Reporting

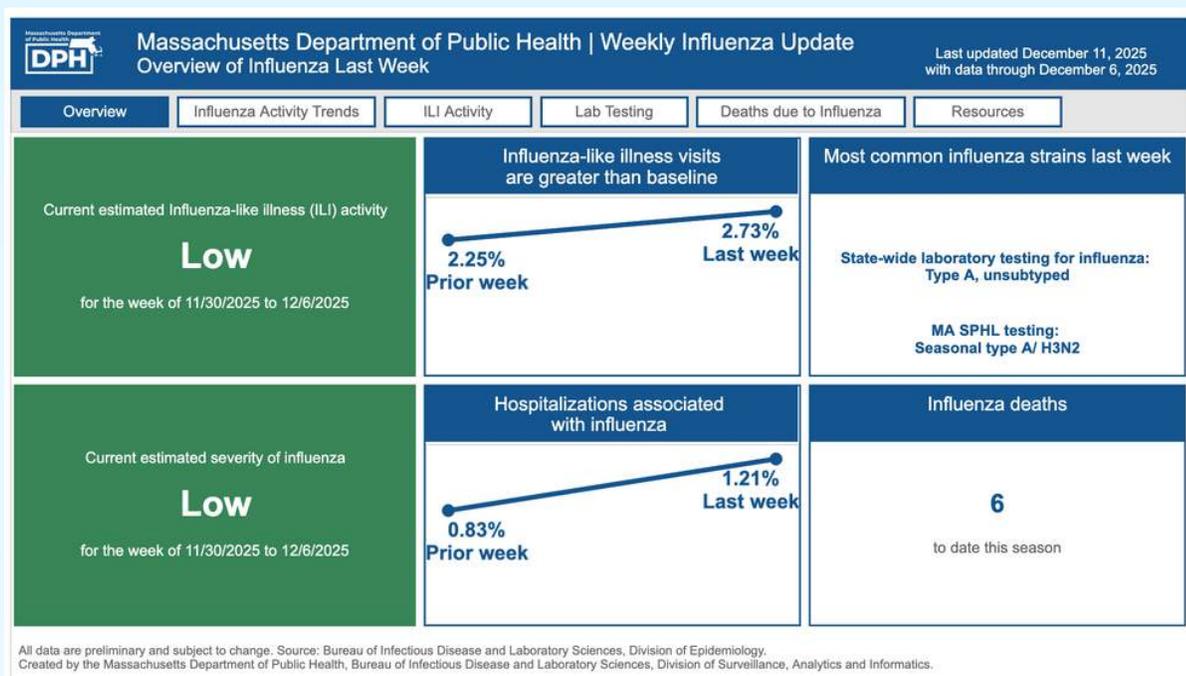


Here is the overall percentages if individuals in Massachusetts immunized against Covid-19 and Influenza

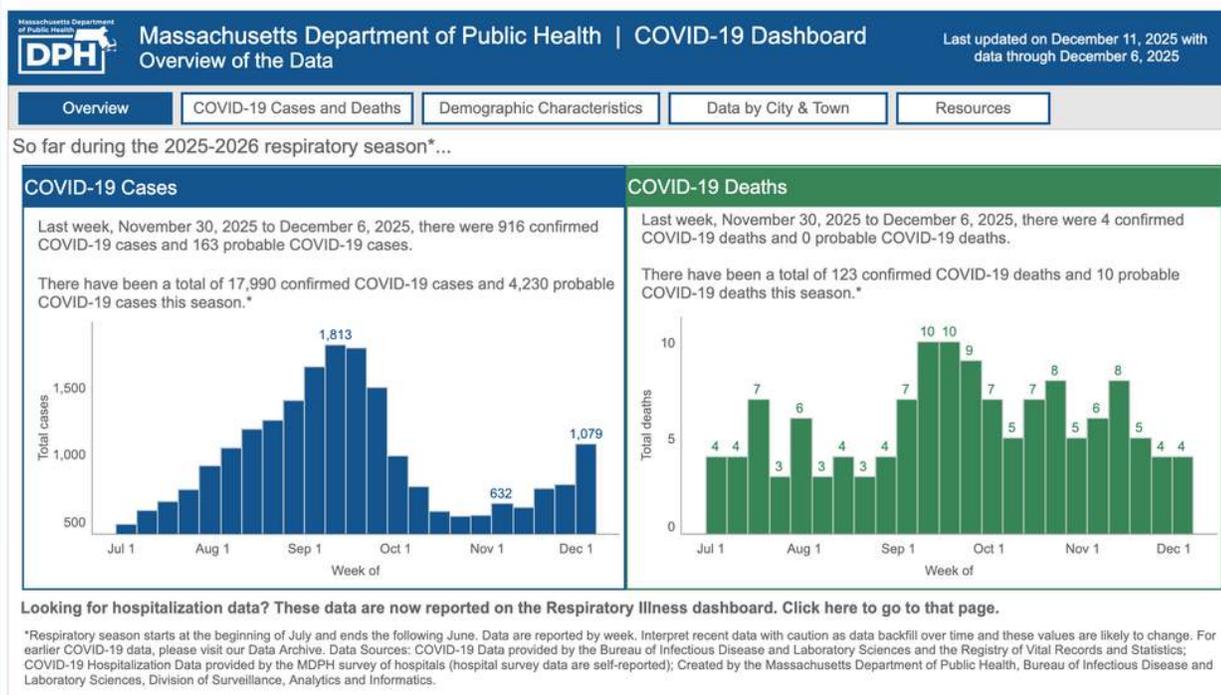


The Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Influenza Reporting – Influenza rate is at Low and Severity is at Low



COVID-19 Reporting – Number of cases have fluctuated a bit



At this point in time there have been no additional updates to the Massachusetts Covid guidelines. The latest version can be seen at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/staying-home-to-prevent-the-spread-of-respiratory-viruses>

Report created by Christy Page: cpage@townoforange.org
Next newsletter will be Friday December 19th, 2025

ATHOL AREA YMCA

FOOD PANTRY

486 MAIN STREET ATHOL, MA 01331



OPEN HOURS

MONDAY, TUESDAY, & THURSDAY 1-7

WEDNESDAY 3-7

FRIDAY 1-5

NO APPOINTMENT NEEDED

NO PRIOR VERIFICATION NEEDED





Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

INTRO TO HEALTHY LIVING

PART TWO OF A THREE PART SERIES

Date: December 13, 2025

Time: 1:00pm - 2:00 pm

**Location: New Salem Public Library
23 S. Main St. New Salem, MA**

Join the North Quabbin Health Collaborative's Public Health Nurse for a free workshop and presentation.

An introduction to healthy living where topics will include the importance of sleep and the impact of social connections..

2026 Beyond Trauma: A Healing Journey

A Collaboration
Between the Brick
House & the
Salasin Project

Wednesdays 1-2:30 starting
January 14th & running
through March 4th

Hybrid group, live at
The Salasin Project
33 Riddell St #1, Greenfield, MA
Zoom option available

A Healing Journey is a confidential support and discussion group that explores the impact of interpersonal violence and trauma on individuals. The group will explore ideas for creating safety and developing healthy relationships while sharing healing activities for the mind, body, and spirit. This group is open to people who identify as female, femme, or non-binary/trans and relate to aspects of womanhood, and are age 18 or older.

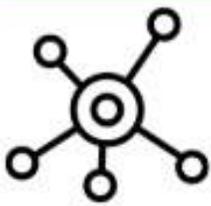
Registration Required.

To register, please call either **Stacey**
(413-800-2496) or **Lynn** (413-575-0042)

For more information, please email
slangknecht@brickhousecommunity.org, or
lynn-salasin@wmtcinfo.org



www.brickhousecommunity.org



Regional Hub - Athol

Athol has identified nine warming centers that can be used during the day for the 2025-2026 winter season. Phone charging and restrooms are available at each site. Please be respectful of the open hours and staff at each location. These warming centers are activated when temperatures reach 20 degrees. Athol has also created an overnight warming center activated from 10 PM to 6 AM by the Athol Fire Chief at the North Quabbin Recovery Center, 416 Main Street, Athol, when temperature thresholds reach 20 degrees, using community volunteers.

Athol Select Board Contact:

Rebecca Bialecki, 978.505.0548, rebeccabialecki@gmail.com.



**01. Athol Area YMCA, 545 Main Street, Athol, MA
978.249.3305, 12 PM - 9 PM, Monday-Saturday.**



**02. Athol Council on Aging, 82 Freedom Street, Athol, MA
978.249.8986, 9 AM - 3 PM, Monday-Friday.**



**03. Athol Public Library, 568 Main Street, Athol, MA
978.249.9515, 9:30 AM - 5 PM, Monday-Saturday.**



**04. North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce, 80 Freedom Street, Athol, MA
978.249.3849, 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM, Monday-Friday.**



**05. North Quabbin Community Coalition, 251 Exchange Street, Athol, MA
978.249.3703, 9 AM - 4 PM, Monday-Thursday,
9 AM - 2 PM, Friday.**



**06. North Quabbin Recovery Center, 416 Main Street, Athol, MA
978.249.4989, 9 AM - 12 PM, Tuesdays, Wednesdays,
Thursdays. Also open 3 PM - 6 PM, Wednesdays.**



**07. Patch Family Center, 109 Lumber Street, Unit 5, 2nd Floor, Athol, MA
978.249.5070, 9 AM - 5 PM, Monday-Friday.**



**08. Salvation Army of Athol, 107 Ridge Avenue, Athol, MA
978.249. 8111, 9 AM - 12 PM, Monday-Friday.**



**09. Valuing Our Children, 217 Walnut Street, Athol, MA
978.249.8467, 8 AM - 4 PM, Monday-Friday.**



SERVING ORANGE, NEW SALEM, WENDELL, WARWICK, & PETERSHAM

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.



DROP IN & MEET YOUR COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORKER

**DROP-IN HOURS
AT
NEW SALEM
PUBLIC LIBRARY**

**EVERY FOURTH
TUESDAY OF THE
MONTH FROM
3:00-5:00PM**

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS AROUND ACCESSING HELP?

NORTH QUABBIN HEALTH COLLABORATIVE'S SOCIAL WORKER CAN ANSWER QUESTIONS AND CONNECT YOU TO AVAILABLE RESOURCES & BENEFITS TO MEET YOUR NEEDS INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO:

FOOD
HOUSING & HOME REPAIR
TRANSPORTATION
HEALTHCARE & MENTAL HEALTH
SUPPORT FOR ELDERLY OR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN
SUPPORT GROUPS
& MORE

FREE &
CONFIDENTIAL
SUPPORT

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